

2014

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The Electronic Election - Web 2.0 Technology and Political Campaigns

Kirby Miller, Virginia Commonwealth University

Abstract

The influence of Web 2.0 technologies has infiltrated the political realm, not only being used by members of each political party, but also in each level of civic engagement. The primary problem this study assesses is the extent to which American presidential candidates have used Web 2.0 technologies as a political tool and how these technologies will affect the future of political activity. While Web 2.0 technologies have been widely used by candidates in the two recent presidential races, and while they will see an increased use as the millennial generation emerges in the political arena, the effective use of Web 2.0 technologies will be through supplemental use with traditional political tools and specified use among each form of Web 2.0 technology. The study looked at one article that analyzed data from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey, four articles that had a qualitative analysis of the Web 2.0 technologies used by presidential candidates in the 2008 election, an article was included that summarized the findings in a controlled lab experiment that studied young adults' political use of Web 2.0 technologies, another article was an empirical study of candidate use of Twitter and its effect on candidate salience, and the last article used content analysis and survey research to find a correlation between online political groups and offline political participation. The primary belief is that Web 2.0 technology will be supplemental to traditional political tools. The extent to which they will be used and how they are used is contested among scholars. While some believe that universal, undifferentiated use of Web 2.0 technologies can be an effective political tool, each form of technology must be used differently to maximize political efficiency because each form of Web 2.0 technology melds effectively with a different traditional political tool. Candidate websites and Facebook have been found to enrich fundraising efforts, social media has been found to enhance grassroots campaigning and all Web 2.0 technologies have been found to improve communication and media. These findings show that future political candidates will need to adopt Web 2.0 technologies as a way to enrich their traditional political activities. Campaigns will need to use each Web 2.0 technology differently in the way that will most effectively aid their campaign. Many of these tools will be adopted and controlled by social media directors.

Introduction

When you grow up in Washington, D.C. like I did, waiting for campaign season is like waiting for opening day at Nats Park. Just like you anticipate the green of the newly grown grass and the smell of the freshly grilled hot dogs, you excitedly await the red, white and blue of yard signs and the anticipation of a new political ad on television. Each year, you are surprised by new innovations and tactics used by that year's candidates.

The most recent innovations may be more familiar than perceived. The tech world has taken over the nation's capital with the immersion of Web 2.0 technology in the political realm. While Web 2.0 technology may not seem all that familiar, it is. Those popular Tumblr, Twitter or Facebook pages? Web 2.0 technology. The iPhone that now has a permanent presence in today's world? One of the most common homes to Web 2.0 technology. Any interactive website or page that houses user-generated content is a Web 2.0 technology.

The quick immersion of Web 2.0 technology in the political world, especially in campaign tactics, led me to question to what extent have American presidential candidates used Web 2.0 technologies as a political tool and, even more importantly, how will these technologies affect the future of political activity?

Some Americans may ask themselves why they should care about campaigns that may not affect them. Whether they realize it or not, political campaigns affect Americans' day-to-day lives. The tweets read from news outlets, the trending topics that are set and the information that is disseminated on Facebook news feeds are all a result of the Web 2.0 technology tactics used by campaigns. Web 2.0 technologies dictate the information people receive and how they receive it. This information is how the electorate chooses whom to cast their vote for and directly affects the people elected to office. Web 2.0 technologies affect who is elected and the policy they create while in office, the policy that orders how average Americans live their life, even after election season is over. Web 2.0 technology used in political campaigns affects the laws that citizens follow on a day-to-day basis.

Although some scholars believe that a finite conclusion on the current uses and future impact of Web 2.0 technology in politics cannot be reached, many others believe that analysis is possible because studies have shown that Web 2.0 technologies have been used to supplement multiple traditional political tools and that those who are just now entering the political arena use Web 2.0 technology for political uses most.

What is Web 2.0?

➤ User generated content



➤ Social networking sites



➤ Web-based communities

➤ Interactivity



➤ Collaboration

➤ Video sharing sites



➤ Vlogs and blogs



➤ Open sharing of information

Conclusion

➤ Web 2.0 technologies will see increased use as the millennial generation emerges on the political realm

➤ Each form of Web 2.0 technology should be used differently to improve campaign tactics

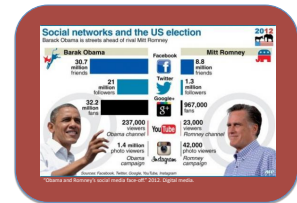
➤ Each form of Web 2.0 technology should be used differently to enhance traditional campaign tactics

➤ In order for a candidate to be successful in future campaigns, they must adopt use of Web 2.0 technology

➤ Web 2.0 technology should be used as a part of a campaigns strategy, not the only aspect of a campaign strategy

➤ Staff specifically for Web 2.0 use will increase

➤ Web 2.0 technology should not be a replacement for personal interaction



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Acknowledgements
A special thank you to Professor Faye Prichard for all her help and guidance.

